

Tip of the



Prevention Application Information from the

Western Center for the Application of Prevention
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Analyzing Tobacco and Alcohol Messages

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This Tip of the CAPT features information taken from the publication *Media Sharp, Analyzing Tobacco & Alcohol Messages*, which can be obtained online at: www.cdc.gov/tobacco/mdiashrp.pdf or by calling: 1-800-CDC-1311 (a videotape is included).

The purpose of *Media Sharp* is to help young people critically look at how the media glamorizes and normalizes unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors. This publication supports a growing emphasis on Media Literacy – the ability to “read” or “decode” messages in a variety of print and electronic media.

Media literacy can be integrated into existing school curricula, youth programs, community activities and family life. It is also an important part of a comprehensive health promotion campaign. Media education works best when you focus on the media youth use and value. Avoid attacking or rejecting their media preferences.

Decoding media messages can be complex, yet fun. Media analysis follows a procedure using seven critical questions to analyze every media message. Knowing the answers to these questions is key to understanding media messages:

1. Who is communicating and why? Media messages entertain, inform, and/or persuade.
2. Who owns, profits from, and pays for media messages? Media messages are owned and they are designed to yield results, provide profits, and pay for themselves.

3. How are media messages communicated? Messages are enhanced through camera angles, special effects, editing, and/or music.

4. Who receives media messages and what sense is made from them? Messages are filtered through the “interpretive screens” of our beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors.

5. What are the intended or underlying purposes and whose point of view is behind the message? Behind every message is a purpose and a point of view. Understanding their purposes and knowing whose point of view is being expressed and why is crucial to being media sharp.

6. What is NOT being said and why? Identifying the issues, topics, and perspectives that are NOT included can often reveal a great deal about the purpose of the media messages. This may be the most significant question that can uncover answers to the other questions.

7. Is there consistency both within and across media? Do the political slant, tone, local/national/international perspective, and depth of coverage change across media or messages? Because media messages tell only part of the story and different media have unique production features, it helps to evaluate multiple messages on the same issue.

Media Tips for the Home

- Know what forms of media exist in your community.
- Recognize that media are important to young people for both communication and expression.
- Know what media your children see and hear.
- Make media use a family event (explore how realistic programs are, examine messages that encourage healthy attitudes compared with those that promote unhealthy behaviors).
- Discuss other media with children.
- Make media use a planned activity (show children how they can learn and be entertained without becoming passive media users).
- Help children understand the commercial nature of media.
- Plan activities that don't involve media.

The six regional CAPTs are funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information on this Tip of the CAPT or other WestCAPT services, please visit our web site: www.unr.edu/westcapt or our best practices website: www.open.org/westcapt. Our toll-free office number is: (888) 734-7476